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# “Philosophical suicide” during the climate crisis: how belief influences the response to climate change

When approaching the climate crisis, there appears to be a universal tendency towards philosophical suicide. When faced with the sheer scale of the problem at hand, falling for the façade of easy solutions seems to be an expected response. However, this tendency towards philosophical suicide may complicate the fight against the climate crisis by drawing attention away from the problem at hand. To approach this problem, the overarching purpose of this article is to determine how the change in the philosophical approach to the absurd may assist in framing the fight against climate change. During the investigation into this problem, it was found that philosophical suicide is a real problem that may be chosen when easy solutions are offered for a problem that sufficiently threatens the individual's state of existence. Furthermore, this philosophical suicide threatens the fight against climate change due to it leading individuals to believe lies perpetrated through strategies like greenwashing. This is of crucial importance since philosophical suicide threatens the fight against the climate crisis by not allowing individuals to consciously approach the problem. However, there does appear to be some hope. If the newer generations are sufficiently educated on the topic, there may be a chance that philosophical suicide, as well as the prevailing sense of dread that

appears to be rampant in the younger generations, can be countered. In this way, educating individuals may enable them to consciously approach the absurdity of the climate crisis and, in doing so, revolt against it.

**Keywords:** absurdism, Albert Camus, climate crisis, greenwashing, revolt

## Introduction

In the 2021 film *Don't Look Up*, two astrophysicists find themselves with the knowledge of an asteroid heading to Earth that will almost certainly end all life. However, though they attempt to save the world from this fate, nothing they do seems to have any impact in a world so mired in distraction and intrigue that even the end of the world may merely be used for short-term profit. The film explores the absurdity of our modern world and our inability to save ourselves from obvious threats. It explores how little influence we truly have in changing our absurd world as well as the shortcoming of sheer goodwill. Although the film is an artistic product of satirical fiction, it nevertheless raises some serious philosophical questions about our responses to the existential threat of climate change. The parallels this film has to our world may be seen in the manner in which our current climate crisis is being approached, and what we are doing about this metaphorical asteroid.

The idea that the climate crisis is an absurd problem (i.e. that the problem can be viewed through the philosophical lens of absurdism) was first proposed by Jacob Fox (2022). According to Fox (2022), absurdism can be helpful both in coming to terms with the climate problem, as well as framing our philosophical revolt against it.

In this article, we will build upon Fox's idea of using absurdism to frame the climate problem, but will provide a more thorough investigation of the different philosophical approaches in response to the absurd. In particular, we will focus on the idea of "philosophical suicide" as this approach seems particularly prevalent in current responses to climate change. The negative impacts of "philosophical suicide" in response to climate change will subsequently be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the role of climate change education of younger generations, in terms of a better philosophical solution to the absurd.

The overarching purpose of this article is to determine how the change in the philosophical approach to the absurd may assist in framing the fight against climate change. This will be done through the following research objectives: 1) a brief conceptual analysis of absurdism through the works of Albert Camus, 2) a determination of Camus's ideal approach to the absurd through the analysis of *The*

*Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Plague* and *The Stranger*, 3) to consider the phenomenon of greenwashing through the lens of the absurd, 4) to determine the dangers of these solutions by analysing the negative consequences philosophically, 5) to discuss "philosophical suicide" in particular as a popular approach to the problem, 6) to determine whether absurdism may help in thinking about climate change, by applying Camus's theories to the existential threat that it poses.

The climate crisis has steadily entrenched itself in the minds of people in recent years as it has become more and more difficult to ignore the effects it has on our lives. Whereas it seems as if this problem has been willfully ignored in the past, present awareness of, not only its effects on billions of people but also the future of humanity, has caused this issue to start to break through the willful denial. However, the simplistic method of ignoring the issue may have shifted into a complicated scheme where the appearance is given of solving the problem, while nothing is truly being done.

According to de Freitas Netto et al. (2020: 1), greenwashing is the strategy of misleading the public into thinking corporations are environmentally conscious, and that their products are not harmful to the environment. This method enables corporations to continue with harmful activities while showing a façade of being ethically responsible towards nature. In this way, corporations can auction off the planet to the great disadvantage of humanity in general and the biosphere at large. This is all the more important as it has become less feasible for corporations to ignore the effects of the new green movement.

It is crucial to understand that greenwashing is not the solution it claims to be and that virtue signalling in this regard is detrimental to our futures, as it allows continued refusal to take responsibility for contributing to the state of the climate. A big problem related to this situation may be the sheer absurdity of it.

In light of the absurdity of the situation, it is easy to lose heart. However, if this seemingly hopeless situation is approached through the use of absurdism, a possible "solution" may reveal itself. In Albert Camus's work, there are three approaches to the absurd. These are suicide, philosophical suicide and embracing the absurd (Aronson 2022). Suicide and philosophical suicide are the avoidance of the absurd through either ceasing to exist or choosing a belief out of convenience. Embracing the absurd is the acceptance of one's powerlessness in the face of a chaotic and unpredictable existence, and revolting against this absurdity by becoming completely free. As Camus once said, "The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion." It is therefore the question of whether Camus's "embracing of the absurd" can be applied to the existential threat of the climate crisis.

When investigating the climate crisis, there seems to be a correlation between the response people have to it and Camus's responses to the absurd. It seems as if there is a tendency towards philosophical suicide. The ability of greenwashing entities to mislead the public may be bound to the willingness of people to believe anything as long as it undermines the cognition of the dire situation in which they find themselves.

In the fight against climate change, access to information and public support is key. The article will conclude with some comments about the education of younger generations with regard to responses to climate change, such as revolt.

## Literature analysis

Before the details of absurdism can be discussed, it is perhaps prudent to first explain the literary sources that will be used in this text. As this is partly a literary analysis, some of Camus's works will form the majority of the literature searches of this project. *The Plague*, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger* make up the main body of text that will be analysed. This conceptual analysis of the absurd will then be further applied to the climate crisis and in particular to "absurd" solutions to the problem, such as greenwashing.

Among the texts that cover a similar research interest as this essay, the journal article written by Jacob Fox has the most apparent correlation with the topic that will be discussed. According to the findings of (Fox 2022), absurdism can be used to approach climate change by helping us come to terms with our predicament, as well as revolting against it. The difference between their article and this essay lies in the specific solution to the absurd under discussion. This essay aims to place a greater focus on and to conduct a more thorough investigation of specifically the idea of "philosophical suicide" and how it has a negative impact on the fight against climate change, whereas Fox's article is cursory in its analysis of the topic.

## Camus's ideal approach to the absurd

To start any analysis of Camus's absurd it is perhaps prudent to begin at the point the philosopher himself saw as the most important task of philosophy: suicide and its related causes. In the words of Camus: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide" (2018: 3). Suicide and the philosophical issues relating to it seem to be at the heart of Camus's reasoning for the importance of philosophical enquiry into the absurd. How we approach this existential certainty forms much of the core of Camus's work. Whether we try to ignore it through willful ignorance or run from it through acts of desperate

self-sabotage, it is clear that, for Camus, the only true solution may be simply to accept the inevitability of the absurd and to revolt against it anyway. Having stated this, it is perhaps prudent to analyse the appearance of the absurd in Camus's work in order to define it.

In the works of Camus, the character and plight of Sisyphus may be best suited to explain the absurd. In the most basic myth, Sisyphus slights the gods through his actions on Earth as well as his attempts to surpass death. For these crimes, Sisyphus is given the eternal punishment of pushing a boulder up a hill only for it to roll down from the summit, an empty and pointless task representing the pointlessness of evading death. For Camus, Sisyphus's fate represents the absurdity of the human condition (Camus 2018: 121). When faced with existence and its aspects, the need exists to attempt to explain the absurdity of our existence. Whether that be the inane life of repetition experienced by many, or the pointless task Sisyphus was given, a search for meaning is seen as a normal human reaction. For Camus, this conscious need to define the absurd constitutes the first part of the absurd itself. This is best exemplified by Camus's statement in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him" (Camus 2018: 121). In this sense, the argument may be that, as we are conscious of our condition, the need exists for us to try and find meaning in our lives in a vain attempt to justify our own seemingly pointless existence. In this sense, if the first part of the absurd is the need to find meaning in life, the second aspect is the sheer impossibility thereof.

For Camus, the absurd is absurd precisely because there is no meaning in it. The pursuit of prescribed meaning itself contributes to our absurd plight. It is at this point in the analysis that some emphasis should be made concerning Camus's statement that the conscious constitutes the existence of Sisyphus's torture (Camus 2018: 121). The implication of this statement may be that our consciousness of our own existence, and the attempted pursuit of discovering some meaning therein, is synonymous with our own suffering. Unlike Camus's Sisyphus, we demand a reason for pushing boulders up hills. It is precisely this desire for meaning that leads to existential strife. Because there is an innate desire to find meaning in the daily repetition of existence, in a vain attempt at proving that it is all done for a reason, people are left vulnerable to the absurd precisely because there is no absolute final cause or reason. Camus's absurd is in its essence our own inability to come to terms with the impossible task of defining that which has no reason or meaning to begin with. For Camus, failing to classify the unclassifiable may lead the individual down three distinct routes, namely: suicide, philosophical suicide, and finally, revolt.

As previously stated, Camus saw suicide as the greatest concern of philosophy. Solving this issue, therefore, is of great importance to him. In the context of absurdism, the reasons, according to Camus, for suicide become more apparent. According to Camus (2018: 4), people commit suicide as they see life as not fit to live. This may be due, in part, to numerous causes, not the least of which is despair over an unfavourable circumstance. However, in the context of the absurd, the greatest cause, in fact, the cause that many other causes fall under, may be due to a profound realisation of the lack of meaning to life. In this sense, suicide is an action of self-termination done upon the realisation of the absurd nature of existence. The realisation that there is no meaning is the catalyst that leads the person to suicide. This is perfectly supported by Camus's statement in *The Myth Of Sisyphus* (2018: 4), "Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined." Where suicide is concerned, this lack of meaning is determined to be a reason for non-existence. As there is no meaning to life, why continue living? For Camus, the sense of deadly logic that leads to suicide is seen as absurd reasoning (Camus 2018: 9). This may be another aspect of the limitation strict logical reason has in approaching the absurd as its logical outcome seems to be the cessation of life itself. However, suicide does not only have this one aspect of its existence. To understand the more metaphysical aspect of its identity, an analysis of philosophical suicide should be made.

If suicide is the costly escape from existential troubles, philosophical suicide is its tamer counterpart. However, where suicide costs the very existence of the individual, philosophical suicide costs your very consciousness. However, the question arises as to what exactly is meant by philosophical suicide. Put simply, philosophical suicide is the leap into the artificial structure of existence after the realisation of the absurd nature of it. In this way the individual, after having realised the meaninglessness of existence, sees fit to find meaning at any cost, leading to the creation/adoption of modes of meaning that aim to simply structure existence. These modes of meaning provide comfort to the turbulent minds of those in search of meaning by providing them with easily attainable solutions. According to Camus (2018: 32-33), after the realisation of the absurd, the destruction of reason leads to the creation of a new mode of reason wherein the previous destructor (the absurd) is labelled as "god" and made into a new sense of structure. It should be said that the new structure is not necessarily religious but merely religious in nature. This structure is not always represented by religions but may be seen in religious behaviour of defining the absurd. It is the inclination and desire not to accept the lack of meaning in existence. Though it may seem to be the most desirable approach to the absurd, philosophical suicide requires certain sacrifices that limit the individual severely. According to Camus (2018: 38), philosophical suicide is the deification of the irrational after rejecting

the enlightenment of the absurd. The danger here may be in the rejection of rational consciousness in favour of a more convenient irrational solution. This leads the individual to seek an easy solution to a problem that cannot be so easily solved, to live without the absurd at all costs. According to Camus (2018: 38), "[t]he important thing, as Abbé Galiani said to Mme d'Épinay, is not to be cured, but to live with one's ailments." In this case, the cure for the absurd, or rather the human consciousness of the absurd, costs the individual the exact consciousness that enables them to be free to observe the absurd. The result is a sense of willful ignorance of the absurd and the rejection thereof. This purposeful surrendering of freedom is where philosophical suicide becomes dangerous. It is not the death of the person, as in suicide, rather it is the death of consciousness and the ability to be free. Without the consciousness to recognise the absurd, the person loses their ability to attain the ultimate freedom associated with revolt.

The last, and preferred, approach to the absurd is the revolt against it. In Camus's work, the character of Sisyphus may be the best example of this approach to the absurd. Camus uses the myth of Sisyphus to explore the ideal human reaction to the absurd. The usually gloomy and torturous punishment with which Sisyphus was cursed gets revised by Camus into a more hopeful tale of human struggle. For Camus Sisyphus does not toil over his punishment, but rather embraces it. According to Camus (2018: 121), Sisyphus's torment can be reflected in the toils and rituals of our daily lives. We are akin to Sisyphus; our lives are an endless and absurd representation of our own struggle to surmount that hill. However, whereas many find refuge in explanations or are resigned to this torturous existence, Sisyphus revolts against it. According to Camus (2018: 121 - 123), Sisyphus, who in life struggled for the pointless goal of forestalling his own inevitable death, staunchly revolts against his now eternal punishment with the same approach he perfected in life. Sisyphus does not surrender to his fate rather he chooses to revolt against it even in the face of its endless certainty. This fact is exemplified in Camus's statement that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 2018: 123). When faced with the apparent meaninglessness of his existence, Sisyphus does not give in to it but rather embraces it. He is aware of the absurdity of his punishment and does not seek any undue meaning within it. He is fully conscious of the situation he is in yet he does not give in to despair; in this way he revolts against his punishment. This is the preferred approach to the absurd. Revolt against the absurd implies the conscious confrontation of it. In this sense, the individual does not turn away from the meaninglessness of the absurd but rather embraces it. The individual creates new meaning, not to ignore the absurd or escape it, but in open revolt against it. To choose to live a meaningful life, even though the individual is aware of the sheer meaninglessness of their existence, marks the Sisyphusian ideal in Camus's work. This is the only

approach to the absurd where the individual retains a semblance of freedom. Suicide may at first appear as the true act of freedom, as argued by the Stoics, but in both the literal and metaphysical forms it takes, suicide can be seen as the surrendering of freedom (the literal through the surrendering of future freedom to utter rationality, and the metaphysical through the surrender of freedom to the irrational).

Examples of the revolt against the absurd can be found in the characters of *The Plague* and *The Stranger*. Throughout *The Plague*, the characters Jean Tarrou and Dr Bernard Rieux are consciously aware of the meaninglessness of their efforts to stem the spread of the plague, yet they still fight it regardless. This is best exemplified by the doctor's statement: "There's no question of heroism in all this. It's a matter of common decency" (Camus 2010: 158). The meaning constructed by the doctor is simply to act according to a sense of common decency towards his fellow humans. There is no denial of the absurd, but rather a confrontation with it. Similarly, *The Stranger* exemplifies this with the main character Meursault's staunch acceptance of, and revolt against, the absurd. This is seen when he rejects the comfort that religion would provide before his execution (Camus 1989: 120-123). These characters are faced with extreme scenarios, yet they choose revolt where philosophical suicide would have certainly lessened their suffering. These characters decided to keep their freedom and their consciousness and in this way emulate Sisypus.

## Greenwashing as a convenient lie?

An example of philosophical suicide may be found when approaching greenwashing, and the false solutions it offers. Greenwashing is an example of philosophical suicide as it is an easy, false, solution to an existential problem that comes into existence due to a lack of consciousness on the part of the individual. In short, greenwashing is a term applied to a corporate strategy in which the corporation does not deliver the anti-climate change promises it made (Dahl 2010: 247). Some examples of greenwashing may be found in the myths surrounding plastic recycling, electric vehicles, and carbon offsetting. Where plastic recycling is concerned, the issue mainly consists of the fact that plastic recycling is ineffectual but is seen as an irrefutable solution. Recycling started as a way for corporations to improve the tarnished image that plastic attained (Sullivan 2020). This was done by tampering with the symbology of plastics (Sullivan 2020). This all was necessary to draw attention away from the fact that a majority of plastics are being incinerated (Brock et al. 2021a, Brock et al. 2021b). The second example of greenwashing may be found in analysing the idea of electric vehicles. Electric vehicles are seen as a miraculous solution for the carbon emissions of



combustion vehicles, with many praising them as the solution to motor vehicle-related pollution (Mirzanimadi 2022: 7, Gustafsson 2022). However, praise levelled at electric vehicles commonly tends to misunderstand the importance that power generation has on determining whether electric vehicles would be feasibly reducing emissions. According to Reuchlin (2022), the quantity of pollution generated from the manufacturing and general use of electric vehicles, is determined by the generation method for the power used to manufacture and recharge these vehicles. To that end, if the electricity generation of a country is not carbon intensive, electric vehicles may be seen as a better alternative to combustion vehicles. However, if a country is mostly powered by fossil fuels, the use of electric vehicles may not make as big of a difference as expected. The last example of greenwashing as philosophical suicide that will be used in this article is carbon offsetting. According to Irfan (2020), carbon offsetting is a way for entities to immediately assist in the fight against climate change by contributing financially towards the fight without necessarily needing to change their personal contributions towards climate change. However, these projects rarely produce any real benefit to fighting climate change. According to Song (2019), many carbon offset projects, for instance those that set out to pay to stop deforestation in Brazil, do not work. These examples express the very real way philosophical suicide manifests in society. When faced with the knowledge that no simple solution will effectively counter the progress of the climate crisis, people tend to favour those solutions that allow them to ignore the severity of the situation. In this sense, there would be a tendency to believe that we can stop climate change if only we recycle more, drive more fuel-efficient cars, or plant more forests. These solutions are philosophical suicide due mainly to the fact that by believing in them the individual does not consciously approach the issue, and does not seek to understand or accept the absurdity of the situation. Instead, solutions are favoured that allow an individual to proclaim that the situation is under control.

## “Philosophical suicide” and the dangers of misleading solutions

### Recontextualising philosophical suicide

So far, in this study, we have looked at both the absurd, in its philosophical context, as well as examples of greenwashing prevalent in the modern world. However, the next step entails connecting these two concepts to better explain the relationship between the absurd and the climate crisis. To this end the absurd and, more specifically, philosophical suicide will be recontextualised and applied

to the more material case study that is the climate crisis. We will begin by first establishing that the threat of climate change, and the broader climate crisis, is indeed an existential threat to us.

In classifying something as existential, it is perhaps useful to first consider the definition thereof. Afterwards, it can be determined if the climate crisis is, indeed, existential. According to Blackburn (2016: 167), something can be said to be existential if it emphasises the individual, choice and the absence of rational understanding. When we look at the climate crisis, and the absurdity surrounding it, the role of the individual is of profound importance in realising the existentiality of the problem. The climate crisis can be said to be existential due to it including all of these requirements. To this end, the climate crisis is precisely an issue due to the individual actions of people, both direct and indirect, born out of a set of choices made either out of ignorance or malice, that show that there is a profound lack of rational understanding on the part of the individual. The underlying issue that is present when investigating almost all aspects of the climate crisis is a profound and crippling lack of understanding, or unwillingness to comprehend the problem. This can be seen in the public being uninformed as to the true scale of the problem as well as to who is truly responsible for this problem. Additionally, the concept of choice is important here precisely because the choices made by individuals, directly and indirectly, contribute to the crisis at hand. Having now established that the climate crisis can, indeed, be seen as an existential threat, the next step is to consider the nature of the absurd and philosophical suicide in this context.

It is at this point in the analysis that we should revisit the absurd. Camus's absurd revolves around our striving for meaning in a meaningless existence. To this end, he explores the solutions we may have when faced with the absurd. This sentiment seems true when the absurd is applied to the more literal aspects of the climate crisis. The absurd here lies in the pointlessness of trying to apply meaning to the meaningless. In this case, take the climate crisis as the existential threat in need of addressing. The broader picture is complicated as there is not one singular manner to address this problem. Furthermore, for many, it may be quite unclear as to why this existential threat exists and how they are meant to combat it. Here is where Camus's leap of faith, or more aptly "philosophical suicide", comes in. As there is this great existential threat facing the individual, they are forced to address it in some way. Probably for many, this issue is better left un contemplated while many more are driven to fix it yet don't know how. It is to these individuals that a greenwashing-based philosophical suicide is pushed. An easy solution to the looming threat of climate catastrophe is, generously, provided to those who fear it by the very entities responsible for furthering the existential issue. The individual is made to understand how they are responsible for the issue. They are

told that this great and looming catastrophe can be fixed if only they recycle one more bottle, buy more sustainable products, switch to electric vehicles and save the forests. All the while they are shown a lie of how those actually responsible are attempting to fix the issue from their side as well. The individual commits philosophical suicide through the acceptance that the issue is as easily resolved as this. They accept that the issue is there due to their individual choices and they believe that they have the power to end the climate crisis through individual acts. In short, the individual takes a leap of faith into the severely simplified version of the crisis ahead, instead of accepting the absurdity of the situation they are in. This approach, though seemingly positive to the individual, hides a darker consequence underneath that needs to be understood.

### **The dangers of a leap of faith too far**

If the individual chooses not to approach the absurd directly, they are spared from having to face much of the existential dread surrounding the climate crisis. This state of being may be attractive to some; however, it is important to understand that this state of philosophical suicide is not conducive to fighting the climate crisis. In accepting the false narrative, proclaiming the ease of combatting climate change, the individual surrenders their freedom of revolt. In the original model, choosing philosophical suicide is akin to the surrendering of the individual's consciousness. Therefore, the assumption can be made that accepting the narrative of greenwashing is similar to the surrendering of the individual's consciousness. Here this surrendering deprives the individual of consciously approaching the climate crisis. If the individual accepts that the issue is not as complicated as it truly is, they are not really conscious. In the original model, Camus uses religion as an example of philosophical suicide as it is the simplified attempt at providing meaning to the meaningless. When it comes to the climate crisis, there can be said to be a sort of religious reference surrounding the beliefs people may have, and the solutions they believe may work. A prescribed meaning currently exists that aims to easily ascribe meaning to something that does not necessarily have meaning. At this point, an explanation should be made as to why the fight contains as much meaninglessness as continuously stated in this article.

The lack of meaning in much of the fight against the climate crisis can be attributed to the scale of the problem, as well as the sheer difficulty of overcoming it. We can envision the fight against the climate crisis as Sisyphus pushing his boulder up a sheer mountain with the boulder symbolising the efforts made against the crisis. It is a boulder that must be moved up the mountain, yet it seems as if this goal is impossible, the boulder always returns to the base, never to reach the summit of the mountain for long enough. When looked at in the

bigger picture, many of the actions taken to ensure that victory is attained, are outweighed by the sheer number of contributions made in favour of the climate crisis. To further draw attention to the scale of the issue, it is apparent that even the individual consumer has little to no power to, as is often said, “vote with their wallets”. If you are in need of certain products, the chances are good that the corporations supplying these products are all owned by the same conglomerate. It is due to this rather negative selection of facts that there can be said to be a pervasive sense of meaninglessness ascribed to the fight against the climate crisis. If progress is made, it is surely outweighed by the sheer quantity of damage done by the entities that cause climate destruction. This is what is meant when the term meaninglessness is used in this essay. However, as this is not meant to be a nihilistic analysis of the climate crisis, the statement that much of the fight against the climate crisis is meaningless is not the conclusion. Rather, it is merely meant to reinforce why philosophical suicide is not the solution to the climate crisis.

Ultimately, though these narratives, born out of philosophical suicide, make it easy for the individual to prevent the sudden onset of existential dread, they do not contribute towards solving the actual issues with which we are faced. Rather, following these narratives directly damages any real attempts made to curb the impact of the climate crisis. By subscribing to the stories pushed by entities furthering climate change, for example, they are being let off the hook. Instead of having a mass of individuals demanding actual change, there is a divide between those wanting change and those who think they have attained it. This severely damages the ability that masses of people may have to force a change. And this point should be stressed. A point has been reached where it has become clear that these entities will not willingly stop their pollution and destruction, as is stated in the narratives they push. Instead, the only real power individuals have in stopping these entities lies in the limited power of a unified and sustained outrage. However, this limited solution is curbed by the divisions in the masses. As has been stated, the vast majority of climate destruction is perpetrated by large entities, not the individual. Even if tomorrow, every individual decides to start recycling and living sustainably, it is unlikely to really make enough of a difference in outweighing the damages caused by the truly responsible entities. It is now that a solution to the existential dread accompanying this realisation should be discussed.

## Accepting the role of the absurd

### Understanding revolt

So far, it has been the position of this essay that there is a pervasive meaninglessness that can be found when any analysis of the climate crisis delves deeper than the surface level of understanding. As has been stated before, when faced with this meaninglessness, it may be easy to fall into despair or to commit philosophical suicide. However, as these solutions are attained due to a pervasive unwillingness to commit to any honest approach to the actual issues relating to the climate crisis, it becomes clear that another path should be taken. To this end, this analysis will be concluded with a discussion of the possible solutions attributed to Camus's third solution, namely revolt.

Before exploring how this third solution may be best, this discussion must diverge into an explanation as to how "revolt" may look in the wider context approached in this essay. It is, therefore, at this point in the analysis that the previously mentioned quote, found in the later part of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, should be revisited. Camus states: "If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him" (Camus 2018: 121). As was discussed, the implication here is that what differentiates revolt from the other solutions is the presence of conscious reflection on the existential problem. If applied to the climate crisis case study the implications may be that the individual must consciously examine the

facts surrounding the issue instead of either resigning themselves to nihilism<sup>1</sup> or accepting false narratives. It should be noted that this process will not necessarily be easy. It implies that the individual will have no convenient solutions or beliefs to fall back on. However, when considering the best approach to the climate crisis, revolt becomes the best alternative. No real progress can be made in combatting an existential threat if at all times the individual is dedicated towards ignorance. This too is true when approaching the climate crisis. However, using the idea of revolt, a possible solution can be applied to the problem of how to approach the climate crisis.

The central themes, surrounding revolt, may provide an idea as to how the climate crisis should be approached. As the climate crisis is a seemingly undefeatable problem for the individual to solve, it may be suggested that the Sisyphean struggle be approached as the titular tragic hero approaches his punishment. It has been made clear through this essay that much of the efforts made by people to counter the climate crisis are for naught. However, that is not to say that the individual can do nothing. Instead, the individual may continue doing their little rituals aimed at solving the crisis, now with a new view of what the true result will be. This individual is not dominated by the idea that they can singlehandedly solve the existential crisis, nor do they pretend to understand it

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1 Nihilism is a theme that appears in the works of numerous philosophers. An example of this would be found in Frederich Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche can be considered the first philosopher to be seriously concerned with the problem of nihilism. For Nietzsche, nihilism is seen as a crisis arising from two fronts: firstly, from the human tendency to subjugate life itself through the appeal to "higher values" and, secondly, from the subsequent realisation that the higher values are intrinsically fictitious (Vazquez 2021). This leads Nietzsche to distinguish primarily between three different types of nihilism (Stoehr 2006): 1) nihilism of despair in those who simply take on the "higher values" unquestioningly and accept the burden of carrying these values, in the process giving up on life and self altogether (see the metaphorical camel or "beast of burden" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), 2) passive nihilism in those who have enough courage to challenge the "higher values", but not enough creativity to subsequently come up with their own new values, thus also losing life (see the metaphorical lion in TSZ) and 3) active nihilism in those who have the will to overcome the "higher values" and create new values, but also, ironically, have the insight to know when to abandon even the created new values (see the metaphorical child in TSZ), thus retaining life and self. In this article, we use the term nihilism in accordance with Nietzsche's second definition (passive nihilism) to denote young people who believe the "higher values" to be worthless, but do not creatively seek to come up with new values in the context of envisioning a future within the realities of climate change. However, we are not analysing the climate problem through the lens of nihilism, but rather by means of the lens of the absurd (see page 3 to 4 of the article for the definition of absurdism). Camus's notion of revolt may be considered akin to Nietzsche's third definition of nihilism, where the realities of leading to passive nihilism is actively negated and meaning is created in response (i.e. the nihilism becomes more active).

completely. Rather, the individual is conscious of the greater problem at every step in their lives. They don't pretend that their actions can make a difference, rather they revolt against the existential crisis. Where before, they acted in tune with false beliefs of supposed individual power, now they are aware of their inabilities. However, instead of despairing over this reality, the individual will continue creating smaller meanings in open revolt against the sheer meaninglessness of this crisis. In this way, the individual may continue acting in any way that may assist, even if it is minuscule, in the fight against the climate crisis. It is important to note that the actions taken by the individual, in this sense, may be seen as useful precisely because it is done with full consciousness of the problem instead of in ignorance.

What differentiates the individual actions done in revolt from those same actions done in ignorance is merely the presence of consciousness. Though these actions may be the same, the conscious individual is not under any false pretences that these actions can magically solve the problem. This may seem to be a rather minuscule difference, however it is of profound importance. The individual, acting out of ignorance, will be easier to deceive than the one acting out of consciousness. This is mainly due to the fact that the person, acting out of ignorance, is in search of any belief they may leap into in order to not face the meaninglessness of the crisis they find themselves in. It is this tendency towards leaps of faith that is absent in the conscious individual. And the presence of this consciousness is precisely that which makes them harder to deceive. Consequently, the mere fact that these individuals are harder to deceive may encourage them to question any beliefs founded in leaps of faith and, therefore, avoid philosophical suicide.

Revolt is, first and foremost, intended to be a personal approach to the existential. It is for this reason that, in this essay, the benefits of revolt are still mainly focused on the individual's clarity of mind, as well as intending to improve the state of mind of people who are at risk of succumbing to nihilism or philosophical suicide. The current state of mind, seen in the general approach to the climate crisis, is a troubling reflection of the absurd. This can be seen in the examples provided in this essay, as well as general observations during our daily lives. When discussing the climate crisis, there is a prevailing sense of nihilism among many who see the fight as pointless, and who are resigned to giving up in all aspects of the fight. Conversely, those who do not fall into this former category, are, frequently, found in the category of those who accept false narratives in order to not fall victim to existential dread. It is therefore the purpose of this essay to highlight the possible third solution. Revolt is profoundly important precisely because it falls into neither category while occupying aspects of both. It is pessimistic without being resigned to nihilism and optimistic without

being ignorant. It is, in short, that golden mean between nihilism and ignorance where the individual is still able to act instead of being forced to act, all the while being conscious of the limitations of their actions. The conscious individual is the person who, when faced with the overpowering scale of the climate crisis, will accept the impossibility of any fight with this absurd concept, while fighting it every day. They will accept the futility of this fight but will revolt against it in every way. The conscious individual is the purest representation of Sisyphus, doomed to an endless and impossible task, but blessed with the consciousness to recognise this fate and the ability to revolt against it by continuing to push that ever-present boulder up the hill. However, as we approach this concept, the greater image starts to reveal itself. The power of consciousness, in this sense, lies in an unwillingness to fall prey to existential lies while still being an active agent. If we accept this, can it not then be said that the rise of conscious individuals may lead to an increase in real contributors to the fight against climate change?

Though the benefits of revolt are seemingly focused on the individual, there may be real-world benefits to having an increase in conscious individuals. As there is a seemingly larger reliance on greenwashing-related strategies employed by entities furthering climate change, it may be theorised that, by removing the basis of this greenwashing, the legitimacy of this strategy can be lessened. It is in this way that revolt may function to assist in the fight against the climate crisis. The conscious individual will act against the climate crisis without falling for these strategies aimed at furthering it. Therefore, an increase in conscious individuals may lead to a decrease in the functionality of greenwashing-related strategies, as it stands to reason that these individuals will seek ways of combatting the climate crisis via acts outside the purview of nefarious entities. Furthermore, as a large part of greenwashing-related strategies functions by having a mostly subdued public, the increase in conscious individuals will significantly decrease that level of compliance. A discontented and conscious public may contribute to the fight against the climate crisis significantly more than the individual. However, it will require the consciousness of the individual to form the greater public consciousness. In this way, the consciousness of the individual, attained through revolt, may have the needed side effect of producing a more conscious public that will be more capable of fighting against deceptive practices that contribute to the climate crisis.

When looking at the current state of the fight against climate change, it becomes more and more clear where the previous shortcomings lie. The carefully constructed facades meant to lull individuals into a false sense of security have started to fail, as evidence to the contrary is becoming widely visible for all to see. And as the cracks begin to show, the sheer scale of the problem has started to rear its head. If there is at least one positive message in this essay it would be



this: we have reached a point of no return, where the scale of the problem has outweighed the flimsy facade placed upon it, where false beliefs and baseless leaps of faith are more and more failing at their tasks. It is at this point, when the reality of the problems we are faced with becomes clear, that it is becoming harder to ignore the lurking catastrophe and the shade it casts over our serene leap into philosophical suicide. Where philosophical suicide has failed, there exist only two options, death or consciousness. The death of the individual and a species, or the choice to accept that this problem is much larger than just the daily recycling of bottles. Taking this all into account, the question may arise as to what can be done about this particular issue.

As the main obstacle investigated in this essay has revolved around a lack of consciousness about the true issues that make up the climate crisis, any solution posed against this will have to solve this lack of consciousness. It is in line with this reasoning that we will briefly discuss how this issue may be improved.

The role of people in positions of authority may be significant in trying to counter this lack of consciousness. Within this category will fall people who, broadly, may be able to raise consciousness in the public. However, we will mostly be focusing on philosophers here. If there is one significant way that philosophers, targeting environmentalism, can assist in combatting the climate crisis, it may be through the improvement in broader consciousness regarding the climate crisis. As these individuals may be seen as authorities on the subject, the inputs they deliver may go far in reducing philosophical suicide. Reducing the foundation on which many nefarious entities base their greenwashing may slowly eliminate the legitimacy of the greenwashing. If most information surrounding the climate crisis encourages a more conscious approach, it may outweigh the information pushed by these nefarious entities that leads to philosophical suicide. Furthermore, as there is a clear role played by the individual, and their willingness to follow a more conscious approach, any attempts to increase the individual tendency towards consciousness would severely decrease the support these nefarious entities rely on. In this area, the public may be assisted into being more conscious by addressing the anxieties, related to the existential crisis, that cause leaps into more convenient beliefs. This too can be addressed by philosophers, as they can encourage better approaches to the crisis. However, as this is an essay about the absurd, it would be highly hypocritical not to address the clear issue with this line of reasoning.

The issue here would simply be that, by the exact reasoning in this essay, there exists no clear and easy solution to this problem. Therefore, any theorised solutions provided in this essay have to be followed with a disclaimer as to their true impact. The process of convincing the highly divided and frequently

purposefully ignorant entity that is the modern public of anything, seems to be a task almost as improbable of completion as is the climate crisis to be solved by the easy solutions pushed through greenwashing. However, that does not in itself disqualify this solution. Convincing people to be conscious of the true implications of the climate crisis is an important task, even if it may end up being highly improbable. However, the act of trying to improve conditions in this way can be considered a revolt against the absurd, a revolt against not only the entities furthering the crisis but against the crisis itself. Though it may be unlikely to succeed, the alternatives are not much better, as they broadly consist of ignoring the issue or falling into despair over it. Therefore, trying to fight the crisis through the eyes of absurdism, would imply that the individual must revolt against the absurd through the conscious evaluation of it.

In trying to counter the effects of philosophical suicide, education may be key. Educating individuals on the merits of revolt may reduce the tendency towards philosophical suicide. That being said, it is important to state that revolt, in this context, does not imply disruptive activism. This form of activism does not constitute revolt in the sense of Camus's work. There is, indeed, quite a bit of room to analyse these disruptive forms of activism and the damage they do to the legitimacy and effectiveness of campaigns to stop the climate crisis. However, for the sake of this article, it should stand that revolt is furthered by education for the sake of gaining a conscious understanding of the issue at hand, in order to take personal responsibility for one's life, rather than disruptive actions.

## Conclusion

In this article, the problem of philosophical suicide in response to the climate crisis was explored. This was done by viewing the fight against climate change through the lens of absurdism. To this end, the literature of Camus was explored, with particular interest placed on *The Plague*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and *The Stranger*. Based on these works, Camus's idea of the absurd was explored, with the aim of expressing the solutions to the absurd contained in his writings. After this, greenwashing and the ways it manifests in society were mentioned as an example of the absurd. Subsequently, the dangers of philosophical suicide, recontextualised to apply to the climate crisis, were discussed. Philosophical suicide was shown to be dangerous by allowing a lack of responsibility for the state of the climate. Finally, in light of the problems surrounding philosophical suicide, the concept of revolt was explored as a better approach to the absurdity of the climate crisis. In conclusion, in the exploration of ways to end the climate crisis, it is the prerogative of the individual to remain conscious of the problem and the education of younger generations may play a role in this regard.

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